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UNCLAS TEGUCIGALPA 001328

SIPDIS

STATE FOR WHA/PDA (MBUCKLEY); WHA/CEN, PD TASK FORCE

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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION ON ARTICLE 98, JUNE 9, 2003

1. Regular columnist Ramon Villeda Bermudez on liberal daily "La Tribuna", Tegucigalpa based 6/7 entitled: "International Disgrace". "The Government of Honduras has committed one of the most degrading acts by approving a "dishonorable agreement" with the United States (Article 98). This agreement prohibits both countries from turning over to the International Criminal Court (ICC) any citizen from both countries that is accused of genocide, crimes against humanity or war crimes. This degrading act violates the Rome Statute of the ICC, which had been approved unanimously by a past legislature."

"The manner in which this agreement was approved was also irregular. First at all, the bill was submitted to the National Congress past-midnight during the final session of the legislature, after the agreement was kept in secret for more than eight months since President Maduro signed it on September 2002. Furthermore, this agreement was approved by a simple majority of deputies of the National Congress, violating a Constitutional clause that states that a two-thirds majority in Congress must approve all international agreements."

"A significant segment of deputies and other social groups have condemned this decision, which makes clear the scarce self-esteem and sovereignty of Honduras. It is time to show our gratitude to the global superpowers with more dignity."

Palmer